

Intown Neighborhood  
Altoona  
Blair County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5789

HABS

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### INTOWN NIEGHBORHOOD

HABS No. PA-5789

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*... when it first became a town . . . [Altoona] had no attractions. Churches, schools, places of amusement, and the hundred other conveniences essential to humanity, all had to be built up. But progress was the watchword. Individuals became inspired by the energy of the company, and the natural consequence was that Altoona assumed an aspect of comfort and thrift in a period of time that would do credit to the wonderful cites of the West.<sup>1</sup>*

Altoona's commercial center, which extends from 11th to 16th streets, and 10th to 13th avenues, includes the west side of the original town of Altoona, as it was plotted from David Robeson's farm. In the 1850s, the commercial center comprised no more than a cluster of frame commercial shops along 10th Avenue (Main Street), which followed the main line of the railroad. The shops were "dirty, disagreeable and ragged;" the streets "abounded in mud of the most tenacious kind." By the 1890s, however, observers could marvel at the unexpected "surprise" of Altoona's rapid growth into a "phenomenal metropolis." And by 1930, the downtown had grown to include a new shopping district, fine financial and theater districts, seven major churches and the center of municipal government.<sup>2</sup>

The development of the commercial district can be divided into four major phases of building activity. Early development (1850-80) was characterized by the predominance of frame shops and low, brick buildings; the 1890s witnessed the first building boom, with a reorientation of the commercial district toward 11th Street. Two later cycles of rebuilding, in 1900-10, and 1920-30, clearly transformed the scale of the commercial district, introducing new building types and a variety of architectural styles. The largest percentage of the present building stock dates from the 1920s.

While the designs of many of the small commercial buildings remain unattributed, most of the large structures were designed by a community of local architects; office buildings, theaters, and ecclesiastical buildings are perhaps the most significant exceptions, often the work of out-of-towners. Regardless of the circumstances of their design, however, the buildings of the commercial district invariably reflect the dominant architectural trends of each period, rather than strictly indigenous or local influences.

#### Early Commercial Development, 1850s-1880s

The borough of Altoona, as laid out in 1849 by John Wright, had no provision for a park or other central, public space. Hence it was the Pennsylvania Railroad Company (PRR), and not a public square or market, which focused and shaped Altoona as it grew. The location of railroad shops just east

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<sup>1</sup>William B. Sipes, The Pennsylvania Railroad: Its Origin, Construction, Condition, and Connections (Philadelphia: The Passenger Department, 1875), 139.

<sup>2</sup>Sipes, 139. See Samuel T. Wiley and W. Scott Garner, Biographical and Portrait Cyclopeda of Blair County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Gresham Publishing Co., 1892), 130, for the development of the downtown in the 1890s. On the 1920s, see "Great Sum Spent on New Buildings," Altoona Mirror (April 28, 1925); "Altoona's Stores Very High Class," and "Buildings Show City's Progress," Altoona Mirror (April 14, 1926). Chamber of Commerce, "Altoona Progress Week--Suggestions to Speakers and Altoona Progress Facts," typescript, 1927, contrasts nineteenth-century 11th Avenue with its present state.

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of 10th Avenue, and the location of the railroad's passenger station, ticket office, and luxury hotel on 10th Avenue in the 1850s, exerted a powerful influence over the way the downtown would evolve. The retail district grew up around these buildings, since the railroad business guaranteed a certain amount of traffic for other commercial enterprises locating in the area.

Despite this influence on the development of the entire commercial district, the PRR's physical presence was confined to two rectangular blocks. The first block, which extended from 11th to 12th avenues and 12th to 13th streets, was bisected by a 15'-wide alley running parallel to the avenues. In 1851-52 the railroad erected a brick building to house its administrative offices on the northwest corner of 11th Avenue and 12th Street. A second office building was constructed on the northwest corner of 12th Avenue and 12th Street in 1863; this U-shaped, brick structure is altered but extant. The chief engineer and division superintendent shared a three-story, Italianate, brick double house, constructed in 1859 at 1210-12 11th Ave.; in 1870 this house became the residence of the railroad's general superintendent and the superintendent of motive power.

By 1890, the PRR properties also included two frame double houses at 1213-15 and 1215-17 12th Ave., which were occupied by clerks.<sup>3</sup> Other high-ranking railroad officials lived in the same block of 12th Avenue, in single-family houses that they owned: John P. Levan, general foreman of the Altoona Car Shops, at No. 1223; W. F. Taylor, chief telegraph operator, Altoona Division, at No. 1225; and B. C. Custer, chief clerk of motive power, at No. 1227.<sup>4</sup> With the exception of the Levan House, which survived as the Red Cross headquarters through the 1960s, these dwellings were replaced by commercial development in the two first decades of the twentieth century.

The second block, between 10th and 12th avenues and 12th to 13th streets, consisted of the Logan House Hotel complex, which included the railroad's ticket office and passenger station on 10th Avenue. The oldest and most distinguished hotel in town, the four-story brick Logan House was heralded as a luxury hotel when it was constructed by the PRR in 1855. By the late 1910s, however, the hotel was considered less than first class because it lacked the conveniences of modern plumbing; it was finally demolished in 1931 to make way for the new U.S. post office. Shortly after completion of the Logan House, smaller botels--at first frame, and later brick--were built on 10th Avenue to answer rail passengers' additional needs for overnight accommodations. There were seven such hotels in 1882, eighteen in 1894, and nearly thirty by 1900.<sup>5</sup> In the early years of the twentieth century, this area--with its proximity to the railroad shops--had developed into a tavern and saloon district.

To encourage the growth of residential neighborhoods on the west side of town, John Wright donated several lots to fledgling Protestant congregations. The First Presbyterian Church, which originally located on the corner of 12th Avenue and 13th Street, and the First Evangelical Lutheran Church (HABS No. PA-5513), founded at 1409-11 11th Ave., received lots from Wright for \$100 each,

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<sup>3</sup>Tax assessments for 1890.

<sup>4</sup>Map of the City of Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: H. E. Kaufman, 1882). City directories.

\*An asterisk following a building name or address indicates that illustrations and more detailed information on the building can be found in its HABS Report in Appendix A. Reports are or organized alphabetically by street name or number.

<sup>5</sup>Map of the City of Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: H. E. Kaufman, 1882). Insurance Maps of Altoona, Pennsylvania (New York: Sanborn-Perris Co., 1894). City directory for 1900.

in 1851 and 1852, respectively; the First Methodist Episcopal Church (HABS No. PA-5521) (Wright's own congregation) obtained a desirable 100' x 120' corner lot for \$100 in 1858.<sup>6</sup> Their first buildings, erected in the 1850s, were typically one-story wood structures. In response to increasing membership during a period of religious enthusiasm, most of these were replaced in the 1870s by red-brick, Gothic Revival-style buildings with wood or brick steeples and Gothic-arched windows.

When first developed, the commercial center had mostly one- and two-story wood buildings, but these were gradually replaced by brick. In 1869 the city council passed an ordinance prohibiting the construction of wood buildings in specific blocks of the business district.<sup>7</sup> Thereafter, new buildings tended to be brick, two or three stories in height, residential in scale but commercial in use. The Jaggard Building (HABS No. PA-5509) at 1300 11th Ave. is the last example of this type to survive. Constructed ca. 1873-76 to house a dry goods store, the building was attached to a row of contiguous, three-story brick stores and offices that have since been demolished.<sup>8</sup> The last frame house remained on 11th Avenue until 1922, when it was razed to make way for S. G. Kress Company's novelty store.<sup>9</sup> The Kress Building still stands at No. 1406-08, but has been altered with a bricked-in storefront.

#### "Rapid and Substantial Growth," The 1890s

As early as the 1870s, 11th Avenue had emerged as the major business thoroughfare. By 1896, it was described as "the great commercial and mercantile center, where real estate rents are highest. Here are the banks, newspapers, post office, and great dry goods stores, with the passenger station but one square distant."<sup>10</sup> As evidence of its prominence, the street itself received special attention. Eleventh Avenue was one of the first streets to be macadamized, in 1873, and paved with asphalt blocks, in 1889; it also received the city's first trolley tracks, in 1882.

During the prosperity of the 1890s a new building type was introduced to the downtown streetscape: the large, red-brick commercial block, which dominated the city's commercial architecture during the early years of the twentieth century. Between 1890 and 1900, more than fifteen such buildings were constructed, dramatic evidence of how the shopping district, and the downtown in general, were growing during the period. The Casanave Building (HABS No. PA-5519) at 1211-15 11th St., completed in 1894 for harness manufacturer Germaine Casanave, and the Masonic Temple (HABS No. PA-5518), designed by James Windrim of Philadelphia in 1898, are two of the few standing reminders of this nineteenth-century building type. Typically these buildings had flat wall surfaces with little surface ornamentation; the Masonic Temple's use of rusticated stone piers, molded brick bands, and tourelles

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<sup>6</sup>Charles B. Clark, Illustrated Altoona (Altoona: Privately printed, 1896), 80. Richard Beeler, A History of the First Evangelical Lutheran Church of Altoona, Pennsylvania (Altoona: Privately printed, 1955), 14. The Lutherans actually purchased two contiguous lots measuring 100' x 110' for a total of \$300. Deed books: 80/42 (First Evangelical Lutheran Church) and K/364 (First Methodist Episcopal Church).

<sup>7</sup>William Donald Lingenfelter, "A Civil History of the Early Development of the City of Altoona," (Master's thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1936), 2.

<sup>8</sup>Clement Jaggard's tax assessments for 1890. Altoona, Pennsylvania (New York: Sanborn Map and Publishing Co., Ltd., 1888).

<sup>9</sup>"Landmark, Built in 1851, is Razed," Altoona Mirror (April 6, 1922). The dwelling, known as the Jones property, was believed to be the third house built on 11th Avenue. It was constructed by John Wesley of Collinsville for Enos Jones, a pioneer resident of Altoona.

<sup>10</sup>Charles B. Clark, Semi-Centennial of Blair County (Altoona: Privately Printed, 1896), 62.

mark it as the most elaborate example in the commercial district.

The first substantial, downtown business block was the 11th Avenue Opera House, constructed as a market in 1868 but destroyed by fire in 1907. In 1889 Charles Rouss of New York City remodeled the entire building, establishing an opera house and theater on the upper floors. The Baltzell Brothers founded Altoona's first department store on the first floor in the 1880s.<sup>11</sup> The Mateer Block at 1412 11th Ave. (Louis and Michael Beezer, architects; built 1894; partly rebuilt, 1908), and Woodcock's Arcade (built 1887), on the corner of 11th Avenue and 14th Street, are classic examples that no longer survive, as is the Nicholson Block (Charles Robinson, architect; built 1893), long noted for its ashlar facade.<sup>12</sup> Like the Casanave Building, these structures housed stores on the first floor and offices on the second (and third, if a four-story building). The top floor typically contained a large room that was either used as a stockroom or rented as a meeting hall to various organizations.

A second concentration of brick business blocks appeared on both sides of 11th Street, between 10th and 13th avenues. Revolving around the Opera House, this area rapidly developed into Altoona's first theater district. In 1887 Louis Plack built the Mountain City Theatre, a four-story brick building, on the corner of 11th Street and 12th Avenue; it burned in 1889 and was rebuilt as the Phoenix Block, an office building. In 1906 the building was converted back into a theater and reopened as the Lyric, managed by the Keith Vaudeville Company. Destroyed by fire in 1907, the theater was again rebuilt and subsequently named the Embassy, Penn, and Orpheum.<sup>13</sup> A second theater and museum, the Eden Musee and Family Theater, opened behind the Phoenix Block in 1892. This type of entertainment was described as "popular with the large class that cannot afford to patronize the higher priced opera house."<sup>14</sup> It was soon superseded by Altoona's first nickelodeons, introduced in 1905. The Musee was converted to a garage, and demolished in 1951, along with the Orpheum Theatre, to make way for a parking lot.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to the rapid development of 11th Avenue and 11th Street, 12th and 13th avenues remained almost entirely residential in character until after 1905. Charles Clark, in his Semi-Centennial History of 1896, listed 12th Avenue between 11th and 16th streets as "one of the most desirable residence locations" in Altoona.<sup>16</sup> The substantial, brick-veneered homes in the 1100 and 1200 blocks of these streets were built at this time; some, such as the Germaine Casanave House at 1105 13th Ave., were eventually demolished to make way for parking lots. Others, including George Rudisill's house at 1111 12th Ave., designed by Louis and Michael Beezer ca. 1895, and the four unattributed houses at 1106-12 13th Ave. (all stylistically related to examples by Robinson and the Beezer Brothers), have been converted to offices and stores without harm to their architectural integrity. These houses--which feature

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<sup>11</sup>Eleanor Wilson Maurer, "The Theatre," in Blair County's First Hundred Years, 1846-1946, George A. Wolf, ed. (Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania: The Blair County Historical Society, 1946), 290.

<sup>12</sup>Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 44-45.

<sup>13</sup>Maurer, "The Theatre," 290-1.

<sup>14</sup>Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 129.

<sup>15</sup>"Workers Begin Razing Old Parking Garage," Altoona Mirror (June 5, 1951); "Razing Old Structure," Altoona Mirror (June 6, 1951).

<sup>16</sup>Clark, Semi-Centennial, 62-3.

basement kitchens once staffed by cooks, and intact carriage houses--are the last standing reminders of what was once an exclusive, residential neighborhood.

### Commercial Development, ca. 1900-10

This third phase of architectural development was the indirect result of the PRR's expansion of its shops, which led to a dramatic rise in Altoona's population--from 38,000 in 1900 to 52,000 in 1910. Commercial development during this period was characterized by the introduction of taller buildings and new building types, the designs of professionally trained architects.

Building types that illustrate the new scale of the downtown area are the office building and department store. The Altoona Trust Company Building (HABS No. PA-5511) on the northeast corner of 12th Street and 12th Avenue, designed by Mowbray and Uffinger of New York in 1901, was the first Classical Revival-style building in downtown Altoona. The U-shaped, five-story office building introduced new materials--gray brick, limestone, and terra cotta--to the predominately red-brick cityscape, and it was the first downtown structure to boast an electric elevator. Robinson and Winkler's Central Trust Company Building (HABS No. PA-5508) of 1906, and Rothert's furniture store, a six-story, gray-brick building, the work of Shollar and Hersh in 1906 (rebuilt 1906; substantially altered 1988), are also excellent examples of this trend.

Although the more flamboyant Renaissance-derived styles did not flourish in Altoona's commercial district, there is one fine example of the Beaux Arts Baroque. The Mishler Theatre (HABS No. PA-5512), designed by Albert Westover of Philadelphia in 1906 (and rebuilt after a fire that same year) features exuberant surface ornamentation and an opulent interior executed in marble, plasterwork, and painted decoration. Celebrated for hosting performances by John Philip Sousa, Lillian Russell, Al Jolsen, and Helen Hayes, among many others, the playhouse brought large crowds of theatergoers downtown for its evening productions. The Mishler was the first of many commercial enterprises built in 12th Avenue's exclusive, residential district.

Eleventh Avenue continued as the main retail street, drawing large crowds of shoppers and hosting grand celebrations and community events. There were three department stores; the William F. Gable and Company's "Great Daylight Store" was the largest, expanding over time to include nearly half of the 1300 block and a second building at the corner of 12th Avenue and 14th Street. Eleventh Avenue had also become the place for professional men to locate: in 1900, every one of Altoona's lawyers, and many of the city's doctors and dentists, had offices there. In contrast, midwives continued to serve communities of women from their own homes--particularly in the Second and Fourth wards--well into the 1930s.<sup>17</sup>

The decade of the 1900s also witnessed the rebuilding of downtown churches. Stone was a fairly rare material in Altoona, thus most of the commercial buildings were brick, which was locally available. When rebuilding a structure as permanent and prized as a church, however, many congregations selected stone. The First Methodist Episcopal Church (HABS No. PA-5521) replaced its old building with a magnificent brownstone church and attached rectory, designed by M. R. Brown of New York in 1905-07. The First Evangelical Lutheran Church (HABS No. PA-5513) and the Hebrew Reform Temple (HABS

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<sup>17</sup>City directories, 1900-35, passim.

No. PA-5517) (Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church since 1924) turned to architect Charles M. Robinson of Altoona for their new buildings, both of rough-faced, random ashlar limestone. While the Lutheran congregation chose a traditional, Gothic Revival style building, the Mountain City Hebrew Reform Congregation commissioned an exotic Moorish structure with onion domes and horseshoe-arched openings. Christ Reformed Church (HABS No. PA-5514) and parsonage (now First United Church of Christ) were designed in 1902 by Robinson's protegee, Frederic J. Shollar. Among this church's more interesting, eclectic features are a tower with belfry, crowned by four small onion domes, and several Gothic-arched windows with tracery.

In contrast, the First Baptist Church erected the only Neoclassical church and rectory downtown, in 1912-14. The two-story building, which features a tetrastyle Ionic portico, was executed in buff brick with white, glazed terra cotta trim. A second exception to the dark stone churches of the commercial district is the Cathedral of the Blessed Sacrament (HABS No. PA-5516), a landmark on the Altoona skyline. Designed by George Lovett of Philadelphia in 1924, the church's steel frame is clad in smooth-faced, light-colored limestone. Although several auxiliary buildings were demolished when the cathedral was built, St. John's School, dating from the 1880s, survives across the street. A brick Tudor-styled convent was constructed next door to the school in 1924, completing a visually varied cathedral complex.

Fraternal lodges were another building type that located in the commercial center during the 1900s. The Shriner's auditorium, the Jaffa Mosque, lies outside of the project area on Broad Avenue, but six other lodges do survive downtown. The number of extant lodges only hints at the total number of fraternal organizations and secret societies that have flourished in Altoona: twenty-one in 1870, fifty-four in 1896, and more than 100 in the 1920s.<sup>18</sup>

Two of the most prominent organizations constructed lodges during the period. In 1907, the Elks, who had previously rented the fourth floor of the Nicholson Building, erected a four-story, brick-veneered structure with Neoclassical trim on 12th Street. In 1912-13, the Eagles built an unusual brownstone-faced building, which featured Altoona's first rooftop garden. The dedication of the Eagles Building (HABS No. PA-5510) (1106 12th Ave.), May 29-31, 1913, was enough of a historical event to receive front-page coverage in both of Altoona's daily newspapers for three consecutive days. The building was the design of one of the city's most prolific architects, D. George Puderbaugh, who designed a number of Altoona's landmark buildings.<sup>19</sup> Other fraternal lodges include the Knights of Columbus Building (1925-26), also designed by Puderbaugh, and the American Legion Building of 1928 (now the Irish American Club), whose scrolled, pedimented doorway and stone quoins point to a Colonial Revival influence.

### 1920s Building Boom: Diversification and Progress

The decade of the 1920s had the most dramatic impact on the architecture of the commercial center, witnessing a building boom that surpassed all earlier construction activity. According to statistics

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<sup>18</sup>J. H. Lant, Blair County Directory for 1870-71 (Altoona: Advance News Co., 1870), 122. R. L. Polk and Co., R. L. Polk and Co.'s Altoona Directory (Pittsburgh: R. L. Polk and Co., 1896).

<sup>19</sup>The Italian Renaissance-style Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church (1912) and the parallelogram-shaped Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen's Hall (1914) on 8th Avenue are among his most prestigious commissions. For a checklist of Puderbaugh's extant architectural drawings, see "A List of Drawings of the late D. George Puderbaugh, Architect," typescript, compiled by James S. Kasun, Altoona Pennsylvania, n. d.

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compiled by the Altoona Mirror in the 1920s, building expenditures rose dramatically from 1900 to 1925. By the peak year 1924, more than \$3 million had been spent on citywide, commercial building projects. By 1927, the chamber of commerce could boast of a downtown "practically rebuilt anew."<sup>20</sup>

One of the decade's most interesting architectural developments was the takeover by local interests of the 1200 block of 11th Avenue. Most of this block had been owned by the PRR since Altoona's founding. In the early 1920s, however, its landmark buildings were sold when the PRR reorganized and moved its administrative offices to Philadelphia and Harrisburg. Over a five-year period, the block was transformed from a collection of red-brick railroad buildings, which were residential in scale, to a row of five-story commercial structures in a variety of architectural styles.

In 1922, real estate entrepreneurs Jacob and Isaac Silverman purchased the former PRR administrative building on the corner of 11th Avenue and 12th Street for \$240,000--at the time the most expensive real estate transaction in Blair County.<sup>21</sup> They commissioned a Neoclassical-style building with white, glazed terra cotta facades; the building, Silverman Building 9HABS No. PA-5504), 1200-04 11th Ave., was never occupied as the intended department store, but sold to Penn Central Power and Light Company in 1926. Perhaps the most sophisticated design in the commercial district, the First National Bank (HABS No. PA-5506) was described as a "magnificent temple of finance" when it opened in 1924. The design of John Dempwolf of York, Pennsylvania, the monumental, Neoclassical bank incorporated stained-glass skylights and a variety of marble finishes on the interior. Next door to the bank, Jacob Brett chose a more "modern" idiom for his new department store. The Brett Building (HABS No. PA-5507), designed by Julian Millard of Altoona in 1922, is the only downtown building to exhibit the architectural characteristics of the Chicago style--sharp, geometric surfaces, stylized pilasters, and low-relief terra cotta ornament. These three buildings, together with the Central Trust Company Building, create one of the finest, most unified streetscapes in the commercial district.

Other buildings embody the public-spiritedness and civic pride of the 1920s. In 1924, Altoona received a much-needed City Hall (HABS No. PA-5520), designed by the local architectural firm Hersh and Shollar. The structure was in the monumental, Beaux Arts style befitting a civic building of the progressive era. However, it also continued to incorporate various municipal functions under one roof, as had the old building, in contrast to the nationwide trend toward more specialized structures for each branch of local government.<sup>22</sup> The largest building in the commercial center, the Penn Alto Hotel (HABS No. PA-5515), was a successful project of the chamber of commerce, which saw the need for a convention-type hotel; its construction was financed by the issuance of bonds. Lists of original subscribers in the hotel's archives reveal that local businessmen and bank officials were the project's primary investors: I. C. Mishler of the Mishler Theatre, the Silverman brothers, and Jacob Brett were among the largest contributors, but numerous smaller investors also participated in the building campaign.

Altoonans were encouraged to support the hotel's construction by a series of fascinating promotional advertisements appearing in the Tribune and Mirror. Some of these appealed to the ideals of

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<sup>20</sup>"Buildings Show City's Progress," Altoona Mirror, 14 April 1926.

<sup>21</sup>Deed books: 349/251, 346/261. See also "Silverman Block Almost Finished," Altoona Mirror (June 8, 1925); "Penn Centrat to Get New Building," Altoona Mirror (June 1, 1926); and "Deal Closed on Silverman Building," Altoona Mirror (July 1, 1926).

<sup>22</sup>William L. Lebovich, America's City Halls (Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1984), 24-30.

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cooperation and loyalty, civic pride, and civic duty; others attempted to demonstrate that Altoona's future rested in the hands of its citizens (as opposed to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company--although this was never stated explicitly), invoking such words of wisdom from Ben Franklin as, "Citizens of Altoona, we must all hang together, or assuredly, we will hang separately."<sup>23</sup>

The dramatic changes of the 1920s also included a shift in the size and location of the theater district. By the 1920s there were seven theaters in the commercial district, four on 11th Avenue. The Orpheum and the Mishler featured live shows and motion pictures; the Strand, Colonial and others offered only movies. In addition to the theaters, a new retail district, rivaled "only in a few large metropolitan cities," brought shoppers downtown.<sup>24</sup>

The majority of the new retail buildings were three stories tall, with brick bearing walls and large windows, designed to illuminate the interiors of the upper stories with natural light. The roofs were flat, or at least obscured by parapet walls; ornament--often stone, concrete or glazed terra cotta--was applied to the facade. Some of these buildings housed national chain stores: S. H. Kress and Company, Montgomery Ward, J. C. Penney, and McCrory's were only some of the many department stores located on 11th Avenue from the 1920s to the 1960s. Woolworth's, at Nos. 1312-16 is the only one that remains in business today. Others structures housed local businesses: William F. Seller's jewelry store, for example, was located at No. 1408-10, on a site that had been in the family since 1852.

Although comparatively little building activity occurred in Altoona in the 1930s, that decade's streamlined architecture is represented by two downtown structures. The monumental, Neoclassical U.S. Post Office (HABS No. PA-5505), constructed on the site of the Logan House Hotel in 1931, exhibits the flat ornamentation and hard-edged, geometric lines of the Art Deco style. The McCrory's building at 1306 11th Ave. is a fine example of the Art Moderne style. Constructed in 1937, the building has a concrete exterior with a stepped parapet and flat, streamlined pilasters.

Some commercial buildings have been demolished in the recent era of unrestrained urban renewal; the downtown streetscape now has many gaps where a dense and vital shopping district once flourished. The current appearance of Gable's Department Store, with its monolithic brick facade of 1970-71, represents a second major problem of the 11th Avenue streetscape. Many of the facades of the smaller buildings have been refaced in an attempt at modernization. On most of the older buildings, only the upper stories are clearly defined; the windows promise life within, and an ornamental cornice or parapet often bears the name of the original owner. In at least ten cases, these upper stories have been obscured by the application of a blank, modern facade, thus destroying the building's liveliness as well as its historical associations.

Altoona has a rich and diverse architectural heritage, and much of it remains intact. Although most of the theaters are gone--victims of television and suburban mall development-- the downtown churches, financial institutions, government buildings, and retail businesses continue to serve the needs of the city, as do the fraternal lodges. In the future, in addition to raising the community's awareness of its valuable historic resources, new efforts should focus on the preservation and the adaptive reuse of

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<sup>23</sup>These advertisements are collected in five scrapbooks of material relating to the construction of the hotel. Penn Alto Hotel Archives, Altoona.

<sup>24</sup>"Altoona's Stores Very High Class," Altoona Mirror (April 14, 1926).

existing structures to bring more people back to the downtown.

#### PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. An overview of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) provides context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Nancy Spiegel in the summer of 1989 under the supervision of HABS historian Alison K. Hoagland and Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian. Spiegel's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace and Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.